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**EARLY MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE OLD
GREAT NORTH ROAD, WATER NEWTON,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

PUBLICATION REPORT

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NGR: TL 1092 9719	Report No: 4127
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Approved: C Halpin MfA	Project No: 4788
Signed:	Date: Aug 2012

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OASIS SUMMARY SHEET

OASIS SUMMARY SHEET			
Project name	<i>Land adjacent to 2 Old Great North Road, Water Newton, Cambridgeshire. An Archaeological Evaluation.</i>		
<i>In June 2012 Archaeological Solutions Limited (AS) carried out an archaeological excavation on land adjacent to 2 Old Great North Road, Water Newton, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 1092 9719). The excavation was undertaken in compliance with a planning condition attached to planning approval for the redevelopment of the site comprising the construction of a residential dwelling and garage (Hunts DC Ref. 0900813FUL).</i>			
<i>The earliest dateable features recorded during excavation of this site were of early medieval date. These comprised three parallel ditches aligned north to south, a series of shorter linear features which may represent beamslots, and a number of pits, distributed across the excavated area. Some slightly later pottery was recorded in some of these features. A phase of medieval to early post-medieval activity was represented by a single pit. A posthole, a larger sub-rectangular pit and a series of levelling layers or surfaces comprise a third phase of activity dated as late post-medieval to modern.</i>			
<i>Although the Old Great North Road site is small, its identification comprises a significant addition to the corpus of information regarding Water Newton in the early medieval period. It increases the number of locations in the village at which Saxo-Norman activity has been identified and it can be confirmed that activity ceased, or began to cease, here at or around the 13th century; this is consistent with the theory that, at this time, there was a shift in the focus of settlement to the area around the church of St Regimius.</i>			
Project dates (fieldwork)	<i>June and July 2012</i>		
Previous work (Y/N/?)	<i>N</i>	Future work (Y/N/?)	<i>TBC</i>
P. number	<i>4788</i>	Site code	<i>AS1480</i>
Type of project	<i>Archaeological Evaluation</i>		
Site status	<i>None</i>		
Current land use	<i>Overgrown scrub/grassland with trees & outbuildings to the south-east</i>		
Planned development	<i>Single residential dwelling with garage, services & access</i>		
Main features (+dates)	<i>Pits and ditches</i>		
Significant finds (+dates)	<i>Medieval (10th – 13th century)</i>		
Project location			
County/ District/ Parish	<i>Cambridgeshire</i>	<i>Huntingdonshire</i>	<i>Water Newton</i>
HER for area	<i>Cambridge Historic Environment Record (CHER)</i>		
Post code (if known)	<i>PE8 6LR</i>		
Area of site	<i>c. 932.62m²</i>		
NGR	<i>TL 1092 9719</i>		
Height AOD (min/max)	<i>c. 14m AOD</i>		
Project creators			
Brief issued by	<i>Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team</i>		
Project supervisor/s (PO)	<i>Archaeological Solutions Ltd</i>		
Funded by	<i>Mr Robin Waterworth</i>		
Full title	<i>Land adjacent to 2 Old Great North Road, Water Newton, Cambridgeshire. An Archaeological Evaluation</i>		
Authors	<i>Andrew A. S. Newton</i>		
Report no.	<i>4127</i>		
Date (of report)	<i>August 2012</i>		

EARLY MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE OLD GREAT NORTH ROAD, WATER NEWTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Andrew A. S. Newton MPhil PIFA

With contributions by Peter Thompson, John R. Summers, Julia E. M. Cussans

Summary

Excavation adjacent to 2 Old Great North Road, Water Newton revealed archaeological features of early medieval date (9th to 13th century), a single post-medieval feature and modern layers and deposits associated with the use of the site as a garden and yard attached to the adjacent farmstead at 2 Old Great North Road. The early medieval archaeology comprised three parallel ditches, representing three successive demarcations of a boundary aligned perpendicular to the Old Great North Road, and a series of pits and short linear features representing activity within the plot defined by the boundary. Possible beamslots may represent a street frontage structure, possibly indicating that this plot represents a toft and croft-type peasant holding. However, further evidence for this is lacking.

Although the Old Great North Road site is small, and the evidence regarding the nature of the activity carried out there is somewhat inconclusive, its identification comprises a significant addition to the corpus of information regarding Water Newton in the early medieval period. It increases the number of locations in the village at which Saxo-Norman activity has been identified and it can be confirmed that activity ceased, or began to cease, here at or around the 13th century; this is consistent with the theory that, at this time, there was a shift in the focus of settlement to the area around the church of St Regimius, the current building of which was constructed in the 13th century.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2012 Archaeological Solutions Limited (AS) carried out an archaeological excavation on land adjacent to 2 Old Great North Road, Water Newton, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 1) in compliance with a planning condition associated with the redevelopment of the site.

The site was to be subject to an archaeological evaluation but groundworks associated with the development had commenced (site strip and ground reduction) and negated the value of such an approach. The groundworks revealed archaeological features and so a full open area excavation was conducted.

The excavation revealed archaeological remains of early medieval date (10th to 13th century; Phase 1), some limited post-medieval activity (Phase 2), and extensive disturbance, mostly within the western part of the site, of late post-medieval and modern date (Phase 3).

BACKGROUND

The Site

Water Newton is a small village in the district of Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire. It is c.10.6km to the west of Peterborough and c.32km north-east of Corby. The A1 runs through Water Newton and the A605 (Oundle Road) runs north-south to the south of the village. The Old Great North Road lies parallel to the modern A1. The excavation site was situated between 2 Old Great North Road to the west and Hop Corner to the east (Fig. 2). At the time of excavation, it comprised a roughly rectangular plot of scrub/grassland with an area of c.933m².

The site lies in an area of archaeological potential on the northern side of the Old North Road, now a minor road adjacent to the A1 Trunk Road, at the southern edge of the historic village of Water Newton. It lies at c.14m AOD. The local geology comprises middle to lower Jurassic limestone clays and gravels. The soils in the area are the shallow, well-drained, brashy chalk and loamy soils of the Sutton 1 association (SSEW 1983).

Archaeological and historical background

The site is located in an area that has yielded a wealth of Roman archaeological remains. Settlement and industrial activity flourished following the establishment of a fort (Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) No. 05316) and a later civilian town at *Durobrivae* (CHER 01901) c.250m to the south-east of the site. Associated Roman sites, including villas and pottery kilns have been recorded in the surrounding area.

The earliest reference to a manor at *Niwantune* is in a charter dated to AD 937 (Cambridgeshire County Council 2002, 18). In 972 AD, the manor of *Niwanton* was acquired for the Abbey of Thorney by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, from a knight called Ælfric Child, and confirmed to the abbey by King Edgar's foundation charter of 973. It is likely that the manor had also belonged to the earlier abbey which was destroyed by the Danes in AD 870 (Page *et al* (eds.) 1936, 230). The Domesday Book also mentions the church, two mills on the Nene at *Neweton*, 60 acres of meadow, ploughland and the habitual use of the wood of the Abbot of Peterborough.

Despite this documentary evidence, physical evidence for Saxon settlement in the area is lacking until late in the period (Cambridgeshire County Council 2002, 18). Excavations south of Water Newton in 1958 at Elton Road (now beneath the A1) revealed evidence for a late Saxon hall. This was represented by a post-built stockade and a defensive ditch. Later features comprised a system of multi-phase drystone walled enclosures that may have been sheepfolds, cobbled areas, a hearth, oven, postholes, and a broad but shallow north to south aligned ditch (CHER 1578; Green 1964). Ancillary buildings appear to have developed around the hall. The hall itself has been dated to the 10th to 12th centuries while later partition of the enclosure is

considered to have occurred in the 12th to 13th centuries (Cambridgeshire County Council 2002, 18). The location of this site south of the later medieval church and village suggests that land to the north may then have been part of the Nene floodplain and unsuitable for settlement (O'Brien 2002). The site does not appear to have continued into the medieval period and may have been abandoned as settlement developed close to the ford in the area in which the church of St Regimius (CHER 10332) was built in the 13th century.

Although the extent of medieval Water Newton remains uncertain, it is considered likely that the 13th century church of Saint Remigius acted as focus for settlement development (Cambridgeshire County Council 2002, 24). O'Brien (2002) asserts that the focus of the earlier Saxo-Norman settlement was to the south of the village around the Elton Road site.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Evidence for early activity

The earliest archaeological material recovered during the excavation comprised seven sherds of struck flint of probable Neolithic date. This was present as residual material in later features. Also present as residual material were two Roman coins (both copper radiates of 4th century AD date) and 43 pieces of highly fragmented, slightly abraded Romano-British ceramic building materials, mostly *tegula* roof tile with fragments of box flue tile and brick and a single fragment of *opus signinum*. The presence of Roman artefacts is unsurprising given the proximity of Roman *Durobrivae*.

The early medieval period

The earliest dateable archaeological features recorded during the excavation were of early medieval date (10th to 13th century). Medieval features occurred mostly in the southern and eastern parts of the site (Fig. 2). Those recorded towards the eastern part of the site comprised three parallel ditches (F1123, F1145 and F1129), aligned broadly north to south, possibly representing a boundary. The majority of the remaining medieval features were located to the west of these, suggesting that this area represented the interior of an enclosure bounded by these ditches.

These ditches can be seen to run perpendicular to the Old Great North Road, adjacent to which the site lies. They also run broadly parallel to boundaries depicted on the 1674 estate map to the north-east of the current site. This route of the Great North Road is likely to have been extant since the medieval period and so it may be seen that these ditches represent a boundary demarcating a roadside plot.

It is unlikely that all three ditches functioned at the same time to form a single boundary. It is more likely that they represent rearrangement or reworking of the same boundary; this is especially clear in the case of F1123 which is

clearly a recut of the earlier feature F1125. Such reworking may have been carried out due to changes in the function of the plot of land bounded by these features. For example, the dimensions of F1129 suggest that it would not have been capable of preventing the movement of animals unless supplemented by other features, such as a fence, for which no evidence exists. Alterations to the boundary may also be the result of the regular rearrangement of peasant holdings that occurred as they passed from one generation to the next (Hurst 1971, 533).

Given the roadside position of the site, it is possible that the medieval activity represents an enclosed toft and croft arrangement. Most domestic peasant holdings in a medieval village comprised a 'toft' fronting the street, and containing the domestic dwelling and associated buildings, and a larger 'croft' at the rear (Gies and Gies 1991, 34). Crofts could be used either for arable cultivation or for pastoral agriculture (Dyer 2000, 69).

A series of shorter, east to west aligned, linear features (F1073, F1075 and F1077) towards the southern part of the excavated area were interpreted as beamslots, and as such may represent elements of a structure within the 'toft' part of the holding. These were not particularly substantial features, suggesting that any structure that they formed part of may have been of quite flimsy construction. This is in keeping with Hurst's (1971, 533) observation that medieval peasant houses were intentionally not strongly built as each new generation would rebuild the structure when it inherited it from the previous generation; the intercutting nature of these features indicates that, like the boundary ditches, they are likely to represent generational alteration. The profile of these features (Fig. 3) may be sufficient to counter the initial interpretation of these features as beamslots, although this may be a result of the removal of groundbeams when the structure was dismantled. While similar but undated features, which may represent part of the same postulated structures, were present in section to the west, no further elements of a possible building were identified; however, this may, in part, be a result of groundworks associated with the development having commenced prior to archaeological intervention.

Evidence from the faunal and archaeobotanical assemblages is suggestive of a mixed agricultural economy. The assemblage is dominated by sheep/goat and cattle with pig, horse and dog also present; this would appear to be consistent with the norm for the period in eastern England. Wheat, which appears to have been exclusively of a free-threshing variety, was the dominant cereal species in the archaeobotanical assemblage and is understood to have been an economic staple during this period. The earlier medieval pottery assemblage is a fairly average one with local St Neots and other shelly wares the main fabrics represented. Unglazed Stamford ware is also present, making up 24% of the assemblage; this is a fairly local product, glazed versions of which were widely traded and are considered to be of quite high status. This fits neatly with the suggestion that the site represents a fairly low status, peasant holding.

The numerous medieval pits recorded within the excavated area may

represent domestic and/or semi-agricultural activity of the type that may be expected within a toft and croft type landholding. The majority of these pits contained small to moderate quantities of early medieval/medieval pottery and small quantities of animal bone. The animal bone assemblage recovered from the site is not particularly indicative of domestic occupation in the immediate vicinity. Evidence from the archaeobotanical assemblage indicates that the site was probably located close to areas of human activity but may have been on the peripheries of the settlement. However, at other sites of similar date it has been noted that a lack of apparent refuse deposits does not necessarily indicate that a domestic dwelling did not exist in this area. Evidence from Wharram Percy in East Yorkshire shows that the tofts here were kept remarkably clean and contained little refuse material; the majority appears to have been collected into middens before being spread on the open fields (Beresford & Hurst 1990, 44). This line of argument, however, suggests that presence of a partially articulated pig burial, as was recovered from Pit F1067, may be considered unlikely in an area of domestic occupation.

Later activity

Following the cessation of Phase 1 activity it appears that the site was abandoned or turned over to an archaeologically invisible agricultural usage until the modern period. Pit F1047, which contained a partial horse burial, represents the only identified post-medieval activity at the site. It is possible that further evidence of this period was present but was removed during groundworks prior to archaeological intervention.

The site is depicted as comprising the garden of a property to the west, owned by one Richard Holtham, on the 1674 map of Water Newton (Fig. 4a). The 1837 Tithe Map (Fig 4b) also depicts the site as the garden of an adjacent farmhouse/homestead. This is the Grade II listed 18th century former farmhouse and inn at 2 Old Great North Road (CHER DCB3072). The site also lies in close proximity to the remains of a 19th blacksmith's workshop (CHER MCB17591) located c.30m to the north-east (Tann 2001).

Much of the late post-medieval/modern activity (Phase 3) recorded during the excavation is likely to relate to the use of the site indicated on these cartographic sources. Cobbled surfaces and the various levelling layers may be consistent with the site's status as undeveloped, semi-agricultural land or gardens. Dating of the pottery from the surfaces in the south-western corner of the site and from Pit F1115 is consistent with a 17th to 18th century date while that from the large spread of material in the north-western corner is consistent with an 18th to 19th century date. By the time that the 1902 Ordnance Survey map was published two narrow outbuildings had been established within the site. The two modern walls identified at the southern edge of the excavated area, which truncated several earlier features, clearly represent buildings shown in this location on the 1902 and 1950 OS Maps (Figs 4c and 4d).

DISCUSSION

The function of the site in the early medieval period

The presence of a possible boundary aligned perpendicular to the Old Great North Road would appear to indicate that the recorded Phase 1 archaeology represents a roadside enclosure. Although the route of Ermine Street/the Great North Road is known to have altered in the area the exact date of this is uncertain and it is conceivable that the stretch upon which the site lies has been extant since prior to the commencement of the Phase 1 activity.

It is tempting to suggest that, as a roadside plot, the site represents a medieval toft/croft type peasant holding. While the features recorded to the west of the boundary features could conceivably represent domestic structures and associated refuse pits the evidence does not seem strong enough to categorically state that this is the site of a street-front toft with its associated croft extending to the north. All that can be said with any certainty is that the Phase 1 archaeology represents an early medieval boundary with associated, possible domestic, activity. It is possible that the several undated features identified only in section, due to the commencement of development prior to archaeological investigation, may have contributed to a greater understanding of the site in this period if they had been viewed in plan.

The Old Great North Road site and the development of medieval Water Newton

The enclosed site recorded at Elton Road (CHER 1578; Green 1964) appears to have been in use up until the late 12th to 13th century. O'Brien (2002) asserts that the focus of the earlier Saxo-Norman settlement was to the south of the village around the Elton Road site. It is generally accepted, however, that from the 13th century, settlement in the area was focussed on the church of St Regimius, further to the north (Cambridgeshire County Council 2002, 5).

The dating evidence recovered from the Old Great North Road site indicates that Phase 1 activity is likely to have been broadly contemporary with the use of the Elton Road site. Its position in relation to this suggests that it may have lain close to, but possibly on the peripheries of, the main area of the earlier Saxo-Norman settlement. The 12th/13th century shift in the focus of settlement to the north provides an obvious explanation for the reduced level of activity at the site in the later medieval and early post-medieval period.

However, Saxo-Norman remains, earlier in date (AD875-1150) than those at the Old Great North Road site and considered to represent domestic occupation, have been recorded further to the north, at Mill Lane (O'Brien 2002). It is also possible that a church existed at the site of St Regimius before the existing 13th century structure was erected; Newton (2009, 29-30) has noted that date of foundation of a church at a particular location may be earlier than both the fabric of the building and documentary references

suggest. Indeed, it is possible that the undated manor house located to the west of the church (ruinous by 1742) was originally a Saxon foundation; the construction of a church adjacent to a manor house has been identified as a characteristic of late Saxon 'thegnly culture' carried out by the elite in order to distinguish themselves from the less well-to-do (Senecal 2000). The church is described as an integral part of the thegnly estate in the *Gepyncðo* the 11th century 'promotion law' that describes how a ceorl may attain thegnly status (Williams 1992, 232).

If late Saxon activity in the Water Newton area was as widespread as this evidence suggests, then the Old Great North Road site may not have been located at the margins of the settlement at all, making it perhaps more likely that domestic occupation did occur here. However, it is perhaps more likely that this evidence indicates that Saxo-Norman occupation of the area was dispersed or polyfocal in character.

That activity at the site should effectively cease in the 13th century (though some elements of the pottery assemblage may extend in to the 14th century) may be unusual in light of its proximity to the Great North Road. During the 13th century the route was growing in importance as a major route from London to northern England (Connor 2009, 89). The Great North Road fuelled the growth of other settlements through which it passed (O'Brien 2002) and the current site would have been an ideally suited location to take advantage of passing trade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AS is grateful to Mr. Robin Waterworth for his co-operation and funding of the excavation.

AS gratefully acknowledge the input and advice of Mr Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team.

The project was managed for AS by Jon Murray & Martin Brook. Fieldwork was conducted by Chris Leonard. Pottery was analysed by Peter Thompson. Romano-British CBM and Roman coins were analysed by Andrew Peachey. Animal bone was analysed by Julia Cussans. The archaeobotanical assemblage was analysed by John Summers.

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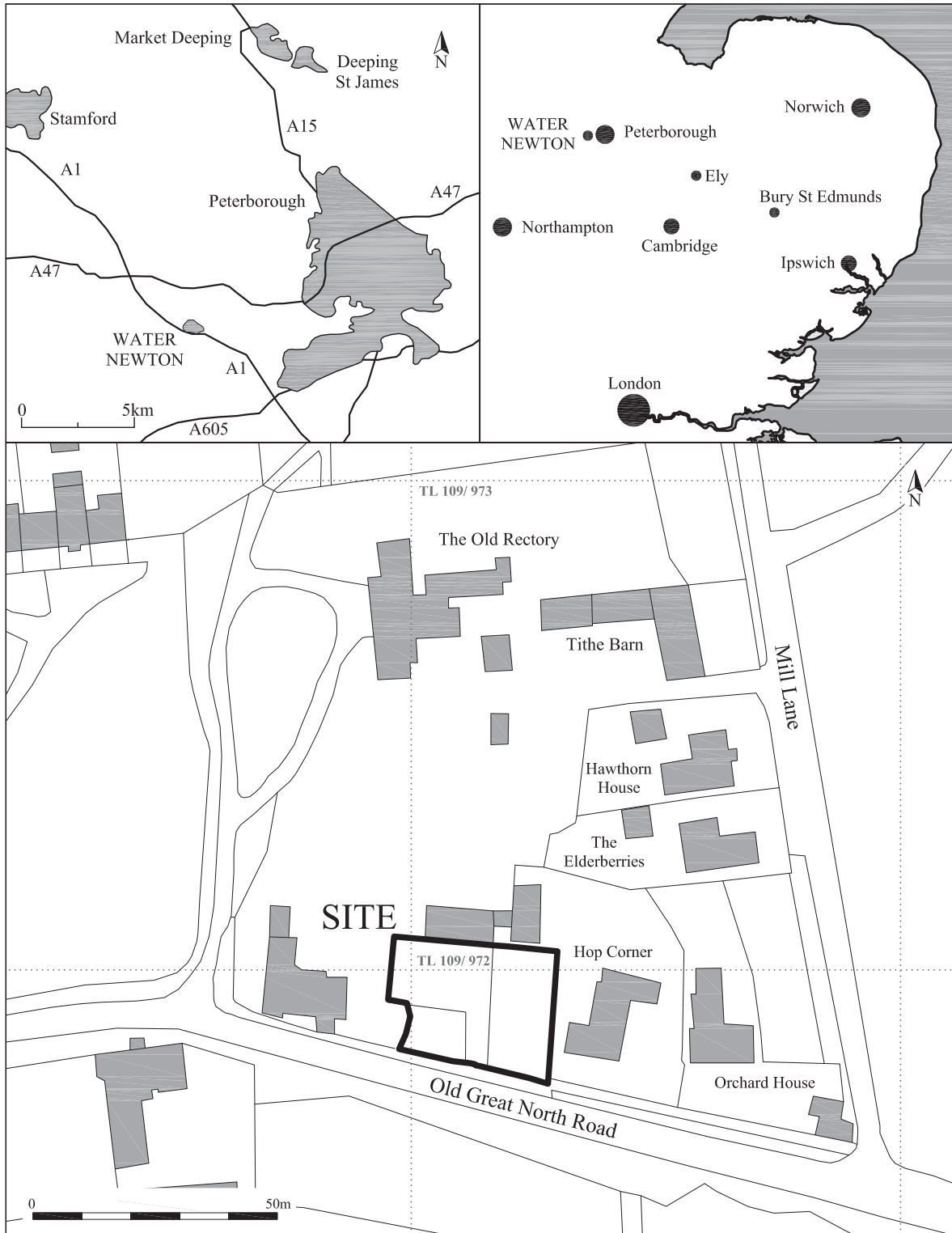


Figure 1 Site location

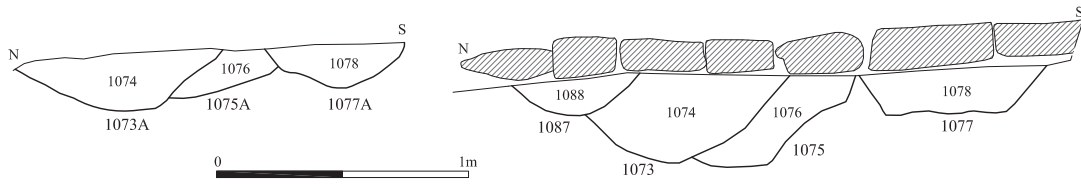
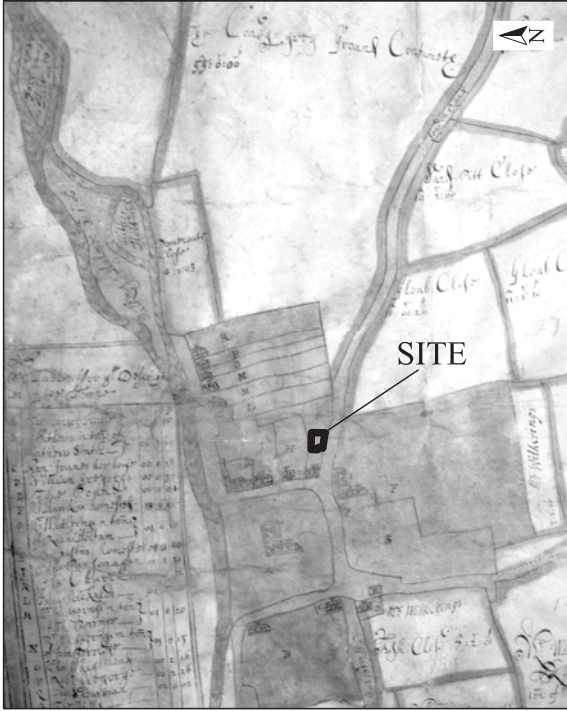


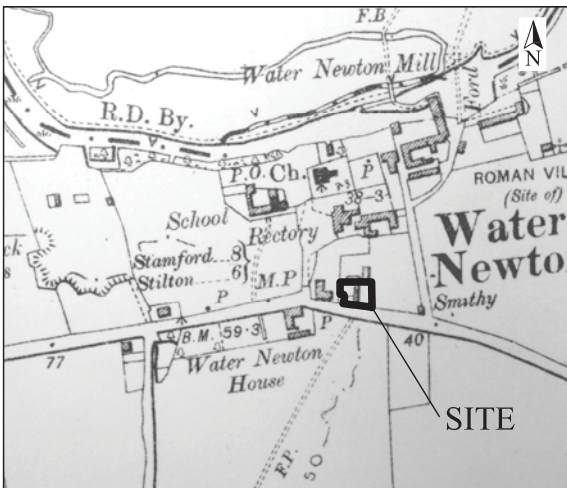
Figure 3 Section drawings of F1073, F1075, and F1077



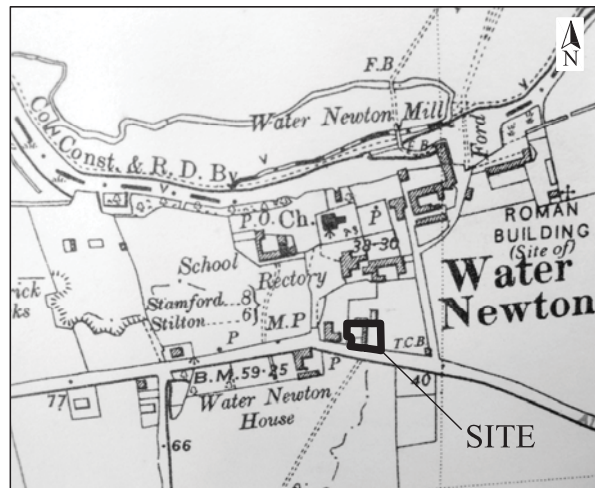
a) Map of Water Newton, 1674



b) Tithe map of Water Newton, 1837



c) OS map, 1902



d) OS map, 1950

Figure 4 Historic cartographic sources